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SUBJECT: NEW ANTI-TRAFFICKING UNIT IN MUMBAI

REF: A. A 08 MUMBAI 226
[1](#)B. B 09 MUMBAI 293

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[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The Mumbai Crime Branch Unit formed a new cell in February to specifically address international trafficking and human smuggling. The unit has already made some progress: it arrested two Air India pilots for smuggling women into the U.S. and rescued several Uzbek and Bangladeshi women. However, in general police attention to domestic trafficking cases in and around Mumbai remains inconsistent. The Mumbai police are routinely overwhelmed with election and festival duties, terrorist investigations, and increased security duties. An anti-trafficking NGO working in Mumbai's suburbs recently turned to the national Criminal Bureau of Investigation rather than local police to successfully disrupt a trafficking ring and rescue several minors. At the moment, the unit's ability to crack larger trafficking networks is stymied by lack of adequate staffing, resources and coordination with other police forces. However, the establishment of the Anti-Trafficking Cell is a step in the right direction. End Summary.

Mumbai Police Announce New Anti-trafficking/Smuggling Cell

[1](#)2. (U) In May, Mumbai Deputy Chief of Police Rakesh Maria, who heads the Crime Branch Unit, briefed Congenoffs about the new anti-trafficking and human smuggling cell formed to exclusively address international trafficking. (Note: The establishment of the anti-trafficking unit in Mumbai stems from efforts of Mumbai's ARSO-I in discussions with Maria and precedes the Government of India's announcement on July 8 that it is working on a proposal to set up anti-trafficking cells in states. End Note.) According to Maria, the unit will have seven investigators and 12 constables when fully staffed, but currently only four investigators are assigned to the unit. The unit does not yet have permanent office space or office equipment. The new unit, also charged with addressing alien smuggling, made headlines in May when it arrested two Air India employees who used their wives' passports to help two women enter the U.S. illegally. Consulate Mumbai's ARSO-I worked closely with Maria in that investigation. ARSO-I is also working with the anti-trafficking cell on a trafficking case -- women taken to the U.S. on performer visas, allegedly to be "cultural dancers," but who were recently arrested in Georgia, along with their visa petitioner, for prostitution. (ref B)

13. (U) Maria said that trafficking of Indian women abroad for sex work often takes place under the cover of cultural shows like "classical Indian dancers." He said that many Indian women are trafficked to the United Kingdom on visas for cultural dancers, but use the dancing as a front to solicit sex. They work as bar dancers, he said, soliciting sex from the dance floor, then perform the acts off-premises after their show, similar to the practice in "dance bars" in Mumbai. He noted that the girls, often recruited from dance bars in Mumbai, go willingly, believing they will make more money abroad. (Note: In 2005, the Maharashtra government banned dance bars in the city of Mumbai, but the law was ruled unconstitutional by the High Court. The case remains pending in the Indian Supreme Court. Meanwhile, the bars operate with the girls serving as "waitresses" rather than "dancers". End Note.) Maria told of one woman, reported missing by her husband in Mumbai, who eventually returned from the U.K. with 6000 pounds (roughly 9800 USD). He said the "agent" usually takes 60 percent of the woman's earnings from prostitution.

14. (U) Tracking the ringleaders has been difficult, Maria lamented. He explained that the traffickers often work from one location for only two to three months before shifting, making it difficult to locate them. A further obstacle is the fact that agents and ringleaders use prepaid phone cards. (Note: Mumbai RSO advises that these agents often also work as fraudulent document vendors and are under investigation through the ARSO-I program at post. End Note.) Maria also noted that Indian states need to computerize police records so that trafficking patterns and networks can be uncovered. He explained that prostitutes generally have a five to seven year "shelf life" during which the traffickers try to maximize earnings from the girls; if a sex worker is arrested, he said, she is often

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relocated by the trafficking ring to another city where she has no record with the police.

More Uzbek and Bangladeshi Women Arrested in Mumbai

15. (U) Maria reported that seven Uzbek women and six Bangladeshis have been arrested in Mumbai for prostitution since the international trafficking unit was formed in February 2009. (See reftel A) Maria contended that the foreign women picked up in trafficking raids come to India willingly to work as prostitutes. He said the arrested Uzbek women came on tourist visas, and since prostitution itself is not illegal under Indian law, the women were released from custody with no further investigation. Though he questioned why India issues tourist visas to single women who realistically would not travel around India alone, he did not plan to raise that issue with the Ministry of External Affairs. Maria said that the policy is to automatically notify the embassy of foreign nationals picked up by police for any crime, but rehabilitation services are not offered for the women because of the language barrier and their resistance to rehabilitation.

16. (U) Maria said his department uses Russian speakers who interview the women to try to obtain information regarding the trafficking network that brought them to Mumbai. He also claimed that most women speak enough English to get by. (Note: RSO Mumbai reports that in previous meetings with Maria he complained of a shortage of English speaking officers. Further, as noted in reftel, the police had no Russian interpreter and the court asked an NGO, Prerana, in December 2008 to find a interpreter to speak to an Uzbek woman to see if they wanted

repatriation assistance. End Note.)

¶17. (U) Maria alleged that most trafficking of foreigners to Mumbai is connected to Russian and Israeli mafia operations in Goa, explaining why the Mumbai police had not cracked the trafficking ring(s). Maria claimed credit, however, for the arrests of leaders of the Central Asian trafficking ring in New Delhi in January 2009, saying that bust was based upon information supplied by his office.

Social Services Branch Handles Domestic Trafficking

¶18. (U) Maria explained that the police's Social Services Branch (SSB) will continue to be responsible for addressing prostitution that takes place in Mumbai--i.e., running sting operations to crack "escort services" fronting for prostitution--but leaving street level solicitation to the neighborhood police precincts to handle. According to Maria, the SSB identifies sex workers advertising in local newspapers under the guise of "friendship services" and arranges decoys to act as potential customers. Once the terms for payment in exchange for sex are agreed upon, the police arrest the girl and the "agent." Maria would not discuss, however, efforts to identify the higher level trafficking networks that bring girls to Mumbai.

¶19. (U) Justice and Care International (JCI), a relatively new NGO on the trafficking front in Mumbai, and other NGO contacts, have told Congenoffs that while Mumbai police have been effective in closing down much of the brothel-based business in the city, most of that traffic has shifted to truck stops, restaurants and lodges just beyond the city limits. NGOs also report that within the city, prostitution operations are now more decentralized, with girls soliciting in railways stations, on street corners, from taxis and through classified advertisements in the newspapers, making it harder to reach the women for rescue, rehabilitation or even to provide health services. While NGOs reported increased police cooperation in

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rooting out trafficking of minors in the brothels, there has been little or no coordinated effort to curb street-level prostitution, according to Prerana and other NGOs working in the city. JCI reports working with both SSB and local police precincts to build awareness of the modes of trafficking of women. One outcome of JCI's efforts is that Maria instructed Mumbai police stationed at the main railway station, known as CST, to watch for young girls coming off trains with men who do not appear to be relatives, as this is often a major way to bring minors and other new sex workers to the city.

Police reluctant to work with NGOs for anti-trafficking raids

¶10. (U) Maria said his office hosts quarterly meetings with NGOs working on child trafficking issues, but he was not keen to involve NGOs in his unit's investigations. He complained that competition among NGOs trying to prove their worth to donors often makes them difficult to work with. He preferred personally selecting the decoys used to expose prostitution, picking trustworthy people who could withstand the pressures of

testifying at trial.

Criminal Bureau of Investigation Rescues Trafficked Minors

¶11. (SBU) The anti-trafficking NGO International Justice Mission (IJM) confirmed that they had been unsuccessful in trying to partner with the Mumbai police, but generally spoke favorably of the efforts of police in Mumbai to address trafficking. Jonathan Derby, Field Office Director of IJM, reported that police in Thane and Navi Mumbai, suburbs of Mumbai, were obstructive, not only refusing to work with IJM, but tipping off the bar owners that a raid was about to occur. Instead, IJM turned to the federal Criminal Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for a recent raid, resulting in the arrest of eight adults for trafficking and rescue of 34 females, including several minors on June 1. Michelle Mendonca of IJM told Congenoff that IJM's investigators met with pimps at a local dance bar, and inquired about "fresh girls," meaning virgins. They were then taken to two hotels where they were shown two young girls. The CBI raided the hotels, and arrested four adults for trafficking. Media reports state the CBI interviewed the rescued girls, resulting in the arrest of four more traffickers and the rescue of another 13 girls in Chembur, another Mumbai suburb. Officials also reported recovering 479,000 Rupees (10,000 USD) in the raids.

¶12. (SBU) The rescued girls were reportedly from Bangladesh and the states of West Bengal, Assam and Uttar Pradesh. Mendonca said that four girls immediately acknowledged that they were less than 18 years of age, one as young as 14 years old. Age verification, completed June 5, revealed that 12 were minors, according to IJM. The girls were transferred to a protective home under the auspices of the Child Welfare Committee. Home studies will be conducted to see if the minors can be safely repatriated to their villages. The older females are receiving counseling to determine whether they are amenable to rehabilitation.

¶13. (SBU) Comment: Aside from his job as Mumbai's lead anti-crime cop, Maria is also the lead investigator into the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Terrorism and other high priorities for the Mumbai police have drained resources and attention from anti-trafficking efforts, but the establishment of these special trafficking units is a milestone for law enforcement in Mumbai. And, like anti-terrorism efforts, anti-trafficking work will get a big boost from improved cooperation among state-level police forces. Like most police units in India, Mumbai's police lack the technology to quickly track cell phone users and integrated computers systems to access police reports from other districts, both which would aid in cracking terrorism networks as well as identifying and disrupting trafficking networks. Digitizing

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police records and creating a shared data base of records and intelligence remains a monumental task for India, especially since law and order is a state issue and India is linguistically diverse. While it will take time for this unit to reach full strength, this unit's establishment is a positive step. End Comment.
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